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OUT INTO THE WORLD: DRAWING AND THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MOMENT

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Anthropology as a discipline has had a long and sustained relationship with the medium of drawing. Drawing has been used as a technique and method by anthropologists since the founding of the discipline at the beginning of the 20th century in order to describe the world of their informants: the people and communities that they work with and alongside. Drawing here is the facilitator of and means of documenting an encounter. Ethnographic drawings are thus distinguished through their reliance upon the original context. Defined by their setting, they are a mirror upon the maker's captured view and are often a means of empathetically responding to their subject. Anthropology, which is rooted in social context and descriptive particulars, regards drawing as principally a means of documentation, one which allows for the embodied experience of the ethnographer, the phenomenological self, to be accounted for within analysis. This paper considers this relationship between drawing and anthropology, its productive use, and its limitations. Anthropology's own history and relationship with the medium sheds light on how drawing's qualities can open up alternative possibilities for ways of working with people. But, from this, the question of drawing's consequence beyond the moment of its making also arises. Drawing has the potential to reach beyond its originating context, to hold both metaphor and concrete description as possibilities, with this dual skill central to its ability to reach across disciplines.

Drawing and anthropology share much in common. Anthropology as a discipline concerned with the life-worlds of others can help frame the potential of drawing as a method of *encounter*. In this brief paper, I consider anthropology's relationship to drawing, its productive use, and its limitations. Its own history and relationship with the medium sheds light on how drawing's qualities can open up the possibility of ways of working with people. But, from this, the question of drawing's consequence beyond the moment of its making also arises. Thus, I want to shift slightly from a consideration of the process of drawing – and what it offers – to its potential as forms of representation, that is, knowledge.

For anthropology, the critical word in regard to drawing is, I would argue, 'encounter'. Historically, drawing within anthropology can be divided up along two separate but interconnected trajectories. Firstly, drawing has been used as a technique and method by anthropologists to describe the world of their informants: the people and communities that they work with and alongside. Drawing here is the facilitator of and means of documenting an encounter. It functions as part of the anthropologist's toolkit to aid documentation and description during the research phase, akin to keeping diaries, interviews, making surveys, writing notes, and collecting artefacts. The *How to Be an Anthropologist* book of 1800 listed drawing equipment as necessary kit; its ability to create a quick likeness, to describe a scene, and record quick impressions were seen as its primary benefits. Here, drawing not only details people through portraiture but also their material culture in situ, including artefacts, equipment, houses, villages and landscapes, and any number of other items that the anthropologist deemed worthy of record.

As early as 1898, anthropologist A.C. Haddon used this technique during his research trip to the Torres Straits Islands to detail his surroundings. From there, drawing has been used relatively consistently, albeit marginally, by numerous anthropologists attempting to visually account for their fieldwork experience. There is a recognition here that the act of drawing itself reveals more fully the environment the anthropologist is in. As Andrew Causey (2017) notes, drawing can allow you to see more deeply.

In recent decades, drawing has been used as a form of witnessing by anthropologist Michael Taussig (2011). In his book, *I Swear I Saw This*, he uses his own drawings as evidence of the turmoil and conflict he witnessed during his forty years of fieldwork in Colombia. Whilst the drawings are observations of his research field and visually legible, their expressive quality provides an index to the emotive, phenomenological experience of witnessing. Here, his work aligns with a recent revival in the use of drawing as a gestural action of the body and particularly the moving body as it performs (see Godfrey 1990; Rosand 2002; Downs et al. 2007), which often regulates the visual to secondary place.

However, the visual takes centre stage in a further iteration of the anthropology/drawing relationship, namely within graphic anthropology, as set out by Tim Ingold (2011). This thesis builds on ideas put forward by anthropologist Ana Isabel Afonso and anthropologist-illustrator Manual João Ramos. For Ramos, drawing is 'an important and creative tool for interacting with and relating to human beings' (2004: 149). In partnership with anthropologist Ana Isbel Afonso, Ramos's drawings have acted as a means to deepen the informants' involvement and served to trigger and explore their subjects' social memories. In doing so, drawing takes on the role of an aide-mémoire, 'helping to render "visible" implicit meanings abstracted from interviews' (Afonso and Ramos 2004: 86).

The research methods employed by Ramos offer new configurations of the relationship between ethnographer and informants. He goes beyond the use of drawing merely as a visual fieldnote, as employed by Carol Hendrickson (2008), to something that is potentially more collaborative, which then informs and makes particular types of relations with interlocutors possible. As Ramos notes, drawing

'becomes part of the anthropological process of tentatively bringing together observer and observed' (2004: 149). The way this unity is achieved, and the subsequent type of understanding it allows for, is a central concern when trying to unpack how anthropology and drawing correspond with each other. However, Ramos's approach (and therefore the understanding offered) could be taken further through reassessing how the drawings are actually produced. It is important to note that Ramos's drawings (see Afonso and Ramos 2004; Ramos 2004) were made at a distance from the people he was working with, and so they were not responsive to the moment as it unfolded, but were essentially tools of elicitation.

A similar approach is adopted by Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld (1999, 2011) in his ethnographic work in Otavalo, in the Ecuadorian Andes. He too uses drawing as an elicitation device but, in his work exploring the spatial perception of Tiguan painters of Ecuador, he offers a more expansive use of the medium. In his early work, *From the Native Leisure-Class* (1999), he was interested in the material culture of the area and he made sketches of both found and crafted objects, as well as local landscapes and vistas. He suggests that drawing as an ethnographic technique fulfils two key functions: the first, representation, and the second, to aid social interaction. As he notes in relation to the latter:

> *Drawings have always offered Otavaleños and others a way into my research. In the first weeks of my initial fieldwork, I used to leave my hosts' home, take up a position on the edge of some public thoroughfare and try and get down some part of the scene in front of me […] others [then] came up to observe and interview me. (1999: 53)*

In his more recent writings in which he works closely with a group of Tiguan painters, he further recognises the expansive potential of drawing, as it fostered a more nuanced engagement with the artists through a process of drawing that was actually *shared* (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2011). The distinction between the drawing *of* objects or landscapes in an environment and drawing *alongside* informants is significant. Colloredo-Mansfeld notes that, unlike previous drawing exercises which only indirectly involved his informants, his new approach to sketching with artists facilitated a dialogue:

> *I relied on sketchbook, pen and ink as a device of discovery. I put the question-generating possibility of artistic practice at the heart of the ethnographic work; at times sitting side by side with a painter, each of us with pens, each working on the same sheet of paper. After six weeks of drawing-mediated encounters, I began to see and feel in practical ways more of what they saw in their paintings (2011: 5).*

Colloredo-Mansfeld's new understanding of the way the Tiguan artists saw their paintings evokes the possibility that drawing can become more than another technology of documentation, albeit one that offers a more subjectively embodied mode of observation.

So, ethnographic drawings are empirically grounded and distinguished through their reliance upon the originating context. Defined by their setting, they are a mirror upon the maker's captured view. Anthropology, which is rooted in social context and descriptive particulars, regards drawing here as a means of documentation that not only describes the setting in which the anthropologist finds themselves but, in so doing, also allows for the embodied experience of the ethnographer, the phenomenological self, to be accounted for within analysis. But this task that anthropology sets drawing has been achieved through a particular register and determines the forms that drawing can take: that is, mostly, figurative and representational.

The second type of drawing within anthropology are those that record the visual traditions of others; specifically, their inscriptive practices, such as the sketches made by the British anthropologist, Arthur Bernard Deacon, dated from 1926–1927, which documented the geometric sand drawings of the Vanuatu people in Melanesia. These analytical images are visual replicas of his informants' drawings (see Geismar 2014). They do not offer an interpretive lens upon the anthropologist's gaze in the way that more figurative images often can. But what is compelling about them, beyond the subject they discuss, is how they introduce the abstract line into ethnographic drawing. However, they also represent the limit of abstract forms, which are generated by others (that of the informants) and only used as part of a process of mimicry. Linked to this tradition is the corresponding convention of schematic diagrams, which have been employed in anthropology to record and communicate kinship ties and social organisation more broadly (see Gell 2006). This has a very distinct history but is detached from the question of drawing's specificity.

But what is true for all traditions of drawing within anthropology is their rigid curtailment of the medium. As anthropologist Chris Wright notes in relation to the visual more broadly, but which can be equally applied to drawing: 'the visual is often still treated within anthropology solely as a technique, an indexical technology for providing reliable data, rather than as presenting a whole range of potential relations, methods and theories' (1998: 21). The absence of abstract ethnographic drawings beyond the diagrammatic really underlies the assumptions about drawing for anthropologists (its restriction to observation and documentation as its communicative purpose), and suggests some of the means through which it enacts a structural curtailment of the technique. One of which is linked to context. Context here is interesting, especially if we ask what are the contextual limits of an ethnographic drawing; what can be rightly considered its context? Much recent theoretical work has privileged the phenomenological experience of drawing and, following this, its materiality.

The recognition of its pre-cognitive, pre-verbal potentiality has ensured that drawing is tied to a host of traits that reaffirm the hold that the moment and place of drawing has over its utility. But perhaps this also has the effect of reducing the relations the work sets up beyond the moment of its making, thereby restricting it instead to the concrete, immediate surroundings of the anthropologist when drawing. In collaborations between anthropologists and artists, in which drawing can take on a central role, there can be an appreciation of the history of the medium and its relationship to wider art historical narratives. Drawing, here, is informed by what has come before. It is oriented and configured in relation to past artworks. But it is often the case that ethnographic drawings are denied any art-historical connotations; they are not conceived of as having a pictorial lineage. This is perhaps fine in some instances but, if those that draw are doing so in dialogue with other art forms, this creates a dilemma for ethnographic drawings.

We can see something of this predicament play out in the work of British anthropologist Alfred Gell. His 1979 drawing, *The Triple Analogy*, in particular visualises his theoretical ideas concerning, in this case, the use of metaphor in linguistic organisation of the Umeda people of Papua New Guinea. It is also clearly informed by Gell's history as a painter and drawer. This is not an ethnographic drawing in the conventional sense because it moves beyond the documentary approach that roots ethnographic drawing to a place, but it also falls short of the abstraction needed to be wholly diagrammatic. It reveals the impasse within anthropology for drawings that fall between these gaps, especially ones that take their formal cues from art historical traditions. The introduction of aesthetics here illuminates further

the challenge for the anthropologist who wishes to draw: can their work be both imaginative speculation, not limited to the figurative, and also, simultaneously, ethnographic.

Central to this quandary is the role that is ascribed to observation. For it to be ethnographic, some would argue, it needs to be based on observation, in real time. In this, observation is often understood as a purely ocular process, but even if we recognise that observation involves the whole body, which many phenomenological perspectives do, the success of the ethnographic drawing is hinged on its likeness, its mimesis. Tied to this is the second factor for ethnographic drawings: the requirement that they are produced in real-time. They are responsive, recording your experience as it happens. The drawing is then a reflection of the event itself, and the work's meaning is framed or curtailed by this moment, potentially excluding anything outside the frame. But what happens once these moments are over? It seems clear that for drawing to be realised as an activity that has the potential to be affective in the world, to operationalise the knowledge contained within it, the question of what comes after it is central to how that occurs.

This brings to mind issues of equivalence between text and image, with images still losing out to their textual counterparts in their communicative potential. Its lack of precision, its open-endedness, and the possibilities of multiple interpretations, or none, seem to have become oppositional to writing. The question, then, which is often posed by anthropologists that are not immediately sure of the value of drawing beyond the ethnographic moment, is how can ethnographic drawings be *read* as anthropology. Or framed in a slightly different way: how can the knowledge contained within drawing be extracted and communicated effectively? How should we position drawing? Art has been introduced here as something of a band-aid to these questions. But in suggesting that ethnographic drawings are somewhere between art and anthropology, we ascribe to them a liminal status that does not move them beyond their moment of making. The question I would like to pose as a closing thought, is whether drawing as a mirror upon people's experiential worlds is necessarily limited to the experience of its making. And can we, or should we, attempt to take account of drawing as more than just an artefact of a moment.

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